

INTRODUCTION

Montgomery County Library Board Talking Points

The complete list of Talking Points is generic and accompanied by some supporting information. LACs are encouraged to select appropriate Talking Points and library branch data to emphasize for letters and/or conversations with public officials and other audiences. Please be sure to personalize the chosen point(s) for your own branch by adding specific survey results, circulation data, and examples.

Below, in boldface, are suggested ways to begin and end a meeting. Please leave your LAC Talking Points with the Council member or Council staffer.

“Hello Council Member(s), my name is _____, I am representing Montgomery County Public Libraries — Where the County Reads, Where the County Meets, Where the County Learns.”

“Thank you for your continued support of Montgomery County Public Libraries — Where the County Reads, Where the County Meets, Where the County Learns!”

- - - Montgomery County Library Board

Montgomery County Library Board Talking Points

LIBRARIES' ROLE IN CHANGING AMERICA

A report to President-Elect Obama's Transition Team by the American Library Association (ALA) revealed that::

- Libraries are sanctuaries of learning - a safe place for children to meet after school or to attend school and public library reading programs.
- Libraries continue to level the playing field by meeting day-to-day information needs of all Americans regardless of demographics (age, economic status, educational background or geographical location).
- Libraries across the country are helping Americans get back to work by assisting people with job searches, providing financial information, and aiding small-business owners in obtaining information available no where else. According to one study, a family of four saves as much as \$2500 a year by borrowing 10 items from the library per month instead of buying them.
- Public libraries are the sole source of no-fee access to the Internet for 73% of Americans without connectivity at home or work.
- Libraries use tax funds wisely.
- Americans are using libraries now more than ever. In addition to online and digital resources, the demand for traditional services has also increased. Online technologies make it possible for people to know more about what is available at libraries and how to access those materials.

IN A TIGHT ECONOMY, USE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES (MCPL) GOES UP

- The **MCPL 2008 Customer Satisfaction Survey** found that our libraries were rated well both in terms of overall satisfaction and in each of the twenty-five service categories identified in the survey. The average overall satisfaction rating was 1.37 on a 5-point scale (1 being highest), and the average service category satisfaction was 7.39 on a 9-point scale (9 being highest). **MCPL's** four customer service categories and five building and amenities categories had the highest satisfaction ratings.
- **Voters** love libraries. Voters can conduct business seamlessly at the library: voter registration, computer use, programs, and community meetings in the physical facilities.
- During an economic downturn more people turn to libraries for services. While business has lagged at store counters, **checkouts** are brisk at the County's libraries and in particular at the Bookmobile.
- In FY08, MCPL had 9 million visits. Eighty-eight percent of visitors came to the library at least once per month. **Circulation** climbed about 3% from September through November 2008 compared to the same period last year. At this point we have smaller staff, fewer programs, fewer materials, longer lines.
- The Germantown Library and the Davis Library in Bethesda saw some of the highest **circulation** gains this year, 8.5%, for the three-month period; both Silver Spring Library and Kensington Park Library also saw higher than average gains of 4%.
- Phone calls and instant message questions to the **Ask-a-Librarian** reference service also have grown by 4%.

THERE IS MORE TO THE STORY

- More people who are job hunting are coming in to use the library and more of them are anxious. The tension shows, for instance, when a patron hits the two-hour limit on computer use but hasn't finished a resume or online job application. With longer waiting lists for **internet computer time** the staff can't always extend the time limit. The library staff almost has to have the skills of a social worker.

- As for **circulation**, percentage increases were highest at two of the library system's smallest outlets. Even the Correctional Facility branch saw a nearly 30% increase during this period, a gain the librarian attributes partly to an increase in the jail population.
- The County's single **Bookmobile**, which serves children in Head Start programs and low-income communities, saw a greater than 40% circulation increase this fall compared with the same period last year. There is no doubt that more children are coming to the mobile van to check out books.
- While demand for library services is up, **resources** are down.
- Libraries are ubiquitous; they touch all aspects of the County, are highly visible and represent a vocal, well-connected community.

NOW THAT WE'VE ESTABLISHED VALUE, LET'S LOOK AT COST

- The MCPL **budget** history might be of interest to those not familiar with the cuts that occurred in the 1990's. There were reductions in service hours, collections, and available staff members. The MCPL system has not yet recovered from those cuts.
- The **mid-year savings plan**, which reduced the FY09 budget, made more adjustments necessary. The reductions were designed to have the least impact on customers and library staff, but like other departments, MCPL could not escape the necessity of making real service and staffing reductions when faced with this kind of fiscal challenge. As mentioned above, the last time the County faced this kind of fiscal challenge MCPL had to reduce the Materials Collection budget substantially and had to reduce service hours.
- During FY09, we are faced with a major impact in our **service to our customers**. There has already been a reduction in the substitute staff budget, elimination of the Office of Multicultural Services, elimination of the second Library Assistant II position at Bethesda Library, elimination of the Programming and Outreach Assistant, elimination of the Delivery and Receiving Supervisor, elimination of five Library Aide positions and a major reduction of the Materials Collection budget for databases (\$200,000).
- The MCPL budget is a very small percentage of the **total County budget**. A 10% cut in the library budget gains the County government less than two-tenths of 1% reduction in the overall budget.
- At 21 full service facilities, MCPL has only 470 staff persons. Each year the system serves more than 600,000 library users or 60% of the County population.
- What is gained by cutting dollars is lost in the good will, confidence, and trust of the County residents and library community.

TO CONTINUE TO BE RELEVANT

- Library users should have continued access to and ongoing updates of materials and programs.
- Children should have after-school and summer programs.
- Teens should have their after-school safe haven.
- Programming should continue for English-as-a-Second-Language users, senior citizens, the disabled and for inmates at the Correctional Facility.
- Computers and technology should be available at a time when libraries report heavy usage so that people are not turned away.
- Sunday hours that see increased community use should be retained.
- Staff should be available to assist customers in their efforts to find jobs or build professional skills.
- Sufficient staff should be available to assist users in addressing significant life issues (finance, health, business, etc.).